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## THE SILVER BOWL.

JOSEPH EZOBI, the author of the poem קְעֶרֶת כֶּסֶף, belonged to a family whose native home was Provence. This family, so far as it has been preserved in literary history, consisted of the father, Chanin Ezobi, and his three sons, Eleazar, Meshullam, and Joseph. They lived in the thirteenth century. Each of them acquired some literary fame, local at least, while in the case of Joseph the fame was universal. In the thirteenth century the Jews of Provence enjoyed a political and social tranquillity which enabled them to apply themselves to the study of those subjects which at that time occupied men's minds. Among the Provençal Jews the Ezobis rank high in literary merit. The father, Chanin b. Nathan, earned a reputation as a poet and grammarian. Abraham Bedarshi in his work אֶלֶף אֶלֶף speaks in terms of eulogy of one Ezovi who was his teacher. There is a little disagreement among scholars as to who this Ezovi was. Carmoly asserts that it was the father, Chanin Ezobi (Ezovi being merely another form of Ezobi). Zunz, however, believes that Bedarshi refers to the more famous son Joseph. Graetz, who also refers it to Joseph, chiefly, and it seems only on the authority of Zunz, proceeds to determine the approximate date of Joseph Ezobi. Abraham Bedarshi wrote an elegy on the burning of the Talmud (1241-1244); therefore his master Joseph Ezobi must have lived in the first half of the thirteenth century (1230-1350). But it is questionable whether this is correct, or rather whether Graetz is justified in assuming that Joseph was the teacher of Bedarshi. For it is certain that Meshullam, Joseph's elder brother, published in Segovia a Hebrew Grammar entitled *Agudath Ezob* in 1272, while a young man and a tutor in Spain. Now, taking this date as a criterion, and if we accept the computation of Graetz, we have an elder brother flourishing a generation later than a younger brother. It would therefore seem more correct to accept Carmoly's statement that Bedarshi's teacher was the father, Chanin, and hence that Joseph's date is the latter half of the thirteenth century. There is a further disagreement as to the exact origin of the name Ezobi, הַאֶזוֹבִי. All agree that it is the name of a town in the South of France, and that the family styled themselves "Ezobi" from the town in which they lived. But four towns have been suggested as being identical with this אֶזוֹבִי, Avignon, Orange, Orgon, and Vaison. Munk suggests Avignon. Cassel thinks it is Orgon (= ὀργεῖον, Sp. Origano = אֶזוֹב). Carmoly maintains it is Vaison, while Graetz does not decide between Orange and Vaison. However, Avignon is probably wrong, and there is no foundation for Orange, the only indecision lies between Orgon

and Vaison. (See Carmoly, *Biographie des Israélites de France*. Francfort, 1868, p. 79.)

The title of the poem, קֶעֶרֶת כֶּסֶף, refers to the priestly bowl of Num. vii. 13. The number of distichs, all of which rhyme with the syllable ה, is 131. It should be 130, for the author says that he wishes the number of his verses to correspond to the 130 shekels, the weight of the bowl. It is a marriage poem in which the father, Joseph Ezobi, instructs his newly-married son as regards his duties and work of life. The popularity which this poem enjoyed for several centuries was due to its simple ethics, its purity of style, and its fine application of religious principles to ordinary life.

My darling son, that art my soul's delight,  
My hope, my joy, my strength in thee unite.  
Peace to thee, Peace, my glory and my love,  
Thy will is God's, its fount is Heaven above.  
The song I sing is thine, accept the gift,  
'Tis offered to thy soul, with heart uplift.  
Compare it not to silver nor to gold,  
Canst thou?—a song it is of price untold.  
My son, a "Silver Bowl" of poesy,  
Thy father's gift, thy father Ezobi;  
A dish that tunes sweet words of gentleness,  
In lines of pearls, in words of costliness.  
The Silver Bowl is filled with songs of Truth:  
Rejoice! but turn it not upon its mouth.

List now, my son, accept this gift divine,  
A father's gift whose soul, whose life, is thine.  
A wedding gift, to smoothe thy path most fit,  
Stay, then, all festive song, all clam'rous wit.  
Thy father strives his happy son to teach;  
Who else? none else thy heart can better reach.  
Say not then thou wilt all despise my song;  
Though pierced of yore, I grieved, in pangs of Wrong.  
Though named the "Hyssop," cedars are my words,  
My speech is clear, as though 'twere song of birds.  
In heart a lion, though in mien a fox,  
My song to me is strength, the strength of rocks.  
A bee in nature, sweetness have I shown  
To them that love—I scorn the brawler's frown.  
Thy father speaks, give ear, he yearns for thee,  
For soon thou wilt be gone, by God's decree.  
A joyous feast I now for thee prepare,

Thy meal is Homily, and Faith thy fare.  
The silver dish, as well its gladd'ning song,  
Is here, alone, in no unseemly throng.  
Its weight is measured as the priestly bowl,  
When brought to God, to cleanse the erring soul.  
To teach for this reward, I am content,  
An honoured name, a life in virtue spent.  
Knowest thou not, thou bear'st thy grandsire's name,  
"Good Samuel the Lion," first in fame.  
Thy name is his, be thou his counterpart,  
Upright and pure in thought, in deed, in heart.  
Fear thy God, yea, more than man fears man:  
Was he not God? long e'er this world began.  
Is he not God? that now the world is grown,  
Eternal Majesty! yet still Unknown.  
God bade the Heaven o'er the earth be spread;  
He is the First, he lives when all is dead.  
His glory streams from Heaven, it fills the earth,  
Beyond the vastest circuit Mind can girth.  
Take this encirclement, extend it more  
And more, to God 'tis small as e'en before.  
Because he chose on Zion's hill a shrine,  
Wilt thou to him a finite Place assign?  
Thou dar'st not God in any form confine,  
"He spake," "He saw," "He stood," are but his sign.  
In one short week creation's work fulfill'd,  
No work of craftsman, but divinely willed.  
To Nature's Law earth moves obedient,  
But God this power to Nature hath but lent.  
He can withhold it, as it was withheld  
When fountains madly gushed and waters swell'd.  
And who is he that dares transgress his word?  
Not thou, my son, for wisdom thou hast heard.  
Seek men of virtue, goodness, knowledge, truth;  
Honour their crown appears, waste not thy youth.  
The company of fools with scorn forgo,  
Nor friend with boorish herds in caverns low.  
Avoid smooth lips that utter flattery:  
Their kiss is false, their smile a treachery.  
Their trifling folly will thine ire incite,  
Their lips are honey'd, but they breathe despite.  
Seek not youth's counsel, it is worse than guilt,  
Its castle totters, as on ruins built.

To teachers, not to books, entrust thy mind ;  
Thy soul with living words, not dead, e'er bind.  
The written book appears expressionless,  
Thy teacher's wand doth give it rich address.  
Put not thy faith in Grecian Sophistry :  
To climb its vineyard's fence, no man is free.  
Its draught will make thy footsteps vacillate  
From truth ; will make thy heart to curse and hate.  
But askest thou in what to set thy lore,  
In Grammar much, but in the Talmud more.  
To know the secret of the Law's restraint,  
Wherein the "holy" and wherein the "taint."  
To find the "goring ox," the "open pit,"  
The cattle's lawless graze, the haystack lit.  
Alfasi, glory to his memory,  
Alone did bring the law to harmony.  
The hungry soul from out his wisdom fed,  
His touch gave life to what would else be dead.  
And after, rose a man of piety,  
Maimonides, the Sage of God's decree,  
Whose books, that on the world their lustre shed,  
In Hebrew and in Arab tongue are read.  
Breathe thou the incense of his off'ring soul,  
The path of rectitude his words extol.  
Accept his laws of life. for he will guide  
Thee near to God ; in him thy trust confide.  
Now here, now then, list to the Midrashim ;  
How oft they brighten words that seemèd dim.  
And like thy father sing in tunefulness :  
Hark thou, a barren soul is profitless.  
Purge well thy soul, no stain therein to leave,  
Remove its grosser parts in virtue's sieve.  
When thou a letter sendest to thy friend,  
Is it neatly written ? nay ? 'twill sure offend ;  
For in his penmanship man stands revealed—  
Purest intent by chastest style is sealed.  
Be heedful then when thou dost pen thy songs ;  
To lofty strains a goodly hand belongs.  
Stay yet, my son, a little longer stay,  
Agree what grace repositeth in my lay.  
In scales of prudence weigh what thou wilt do,  
Or say, in scales of resolution too.  
The golden mean in all has nameless price ;

E'en virtue in extreme doth turn a vice.  
Thy body's strife against thy soul, let cease;  
Between the two contrive a bond of peace.  
The flesh of man must needs be satiate;  
Remember too the soul hath claims as great.  
But if the grip of lust seize hold of thee  
Kill lust, lest thou be doomed to slavery.  
In vestments wilt thou go beyond excess?  
'Tis Folly rests its honour in its dress.  
A little sleep, my son, invigorates;  
A sluggard's sleep, my son, his life prostrates.  
From languid wantonness restrain thy soul,  
Yet overhaste and vehemence control.  
Inquire and learn wherefore the laws divine,  
What mean the words "these statutes—they are mine."  
On festive days, be thine to joy in feast,  
But spare debauch on flesh of fatted beast.  
Waste not the holy days in wine and meal;  
Look more, the sickness of thy soul to heal;  
Thus make the seventh day, the Day of Rest,  
With higher, nobler influences blest.  
Seek thou the House of God at night or day,  
All humbly open thou thy lips, but pray.  
Rage not because thy 'lotted place is low;  
There lurks no nook too small for God to know.  
In manly virtue set thy manhood's worth,  
No place can lessen it, nor lowly birth.  
From town to town, if thou dost make thy way,  
And find'st men strict, be thou as strict as they.  
But dure not long when visiting thy friend,  
For he will loathe thee, though he else pretend.  
See how the heart of man doth long for rain:  
A constant downpour? no, 'tis shunn'd a bane.  
Thy word, an answering truth in heart demands,  
Be not smooth-mouthed while bristles mark thy hands.  
Be prone to charity, but vaunt it not;  
Love thou the poor, for joyless is their lot.  
According to thy purse help those who need,  
For every gift doth bring an equal meed.  
If thou hast nought to give to him who craves,  
Yet gently answer him, a word oft saves—  
As kindness alone can urge the youth,  
Not rage that bellows from a thund'ring mouth.

Flee from the slanderer as from a pest,  
His tongue with poisonous fangs ne'er lies at rest.  
Speak thou the truth, the saving truth instil,  
Why should man's words e'er pierce and wound and kill ?  
Thy friend will sometimes whisper thee apart  
His secret ; hide it deep within thy heart.  
Thine own secret from all must be conceal'd ;  
E'en to thy friend, it dare not be reveal'd.  
He once was bound to thee, thy prisoner ;  
Reveal, he now doth stand thy conqueror.  
Abandon wrath ; through anger heroes fell,  
Ungodly rage made God's own seer rebel.  
All loathsome pride detest and scorn—  
The haughty fool, would he were never born.  
Do thou, my son, pursue humility,  
In it behold the grace of dignity.  
All friends with kindly cheer to thee enfold,  
Acquire their hearts without or gift or gold ;  
But strive alway to honour every man—  
The prince, as well the humble artisan.  
A man may walk abroad in simple dress  
And yet within a priceless soul possess.  
All gambling games of chance abominate  
As idol groves, with rites contaminate.  
Flee from the reeking dens, with dicing rife,  
Where spendthrifts waste their every day in strife.  
My son, on this thy wedding day rejoice !  
To song of mirth, attune thy heart and voice.  
Take thou the graceful doe, thy royal bride ;  
With her thy joy and happiness divide.  
A comely form, my darling son, is thine ;  
Corrupt it not, for 'tis a gift divine.  
If evil inclination thee incite  
To wrong, depart not from the way of right,  
But drag the tempter to the house of prayer—  
There thou canst lay his evil purpose bare.  
A power above men's inmost thoughts doth know,  
So that men reap according as they sow.  
While yet youth's glowing ardour thou dost feel,  
Fan it to flame with fire of burning zeal.  
If thou would seek the gates of Paradise,  
Withhold ! on earth thy work will thee suffice.  
Yea, many rushing heaven's heights to scale,

In fruitless quests their misspent life bewail.  
Behold reveal'd creation's mystery,  
List to the strains of heaven's symphony;  
And when the day of good report is nigh  
E'en as Elijah thou shalt rise on high.  
Three crowns there are, and these the world may love;  
A blameless name is more, all crown above.  
Humbly pray God may crown thee with his Light,  
To live 'mid men, with heart, with soul, with might.  
Rejoice with her, thy graceful tender dove:  
God bless you twain, with love as angels love.

I. FREEDMAN.